



NCWA
Northern California Water Association



**Advancing
Modern Water
Management
from Ridgetop to
River Mouth**



2023 Strategic Priorities

Adopted by Board of Directors: January 20, 2023

The Northern California Water Association (NCWA) and water leaders in the region continue to advance modern water management in the Sacramento River Basin* from ridgetop to river mouth and we look forward to working with our many partners in 2023 to cultivate a shared vision in the region for a vibrant way of life. We will also work to harmonize our water priorities with state, federal, and other regions' priorities to advance our collective goal of ensuring greater water and climate resilience throughout California for our communities, the economy and the environment.

I. Introduction

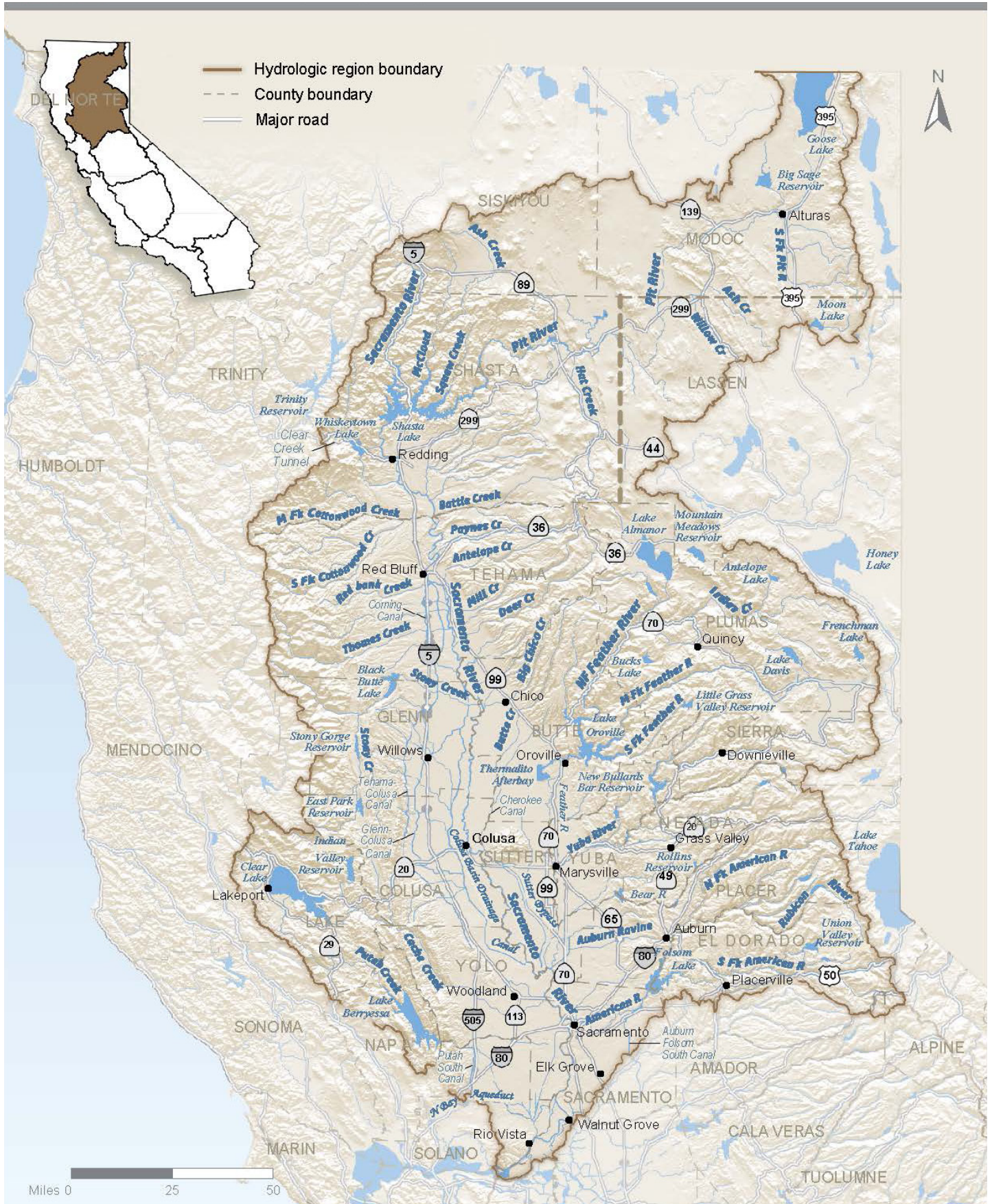
This document provides our organizing ideas and roadmap for 2023. We call upon the leaders in the region and the breadth of experience we have in the Sacramento River Basin to advance these priorities. We continue to evolve and integrate fresh new ideas for water management into these priorities and we welcome additional partnerships to further explore and modernize our water system and implement these actions for water and climate resilience. The guiding principles and pillars for sustainable water management described at the end of this document provide a strong foundation and support for advancing water management in the region.

Californians have built an amazing and highly managed water system. But this system is under strain—as we vividly saw in 2022—as our values in California water continue to evolve and we face increasing recurrence of droughts, floods and fires. California's current population of 40 million will grow to 50 million by 2050. We have the most abundant agricultural bounty in the world, we are graced with a stunning landscape and related natural infrastructure, we are the 5th largest economy in the world, and people pursue endless recreational opportunities in every part of the state. We cannot take any of this for granted! Water is essential for all of these special features that define California. A balanced and contemplative approach that embraces and then enhances California's unique values in water is needed for this great state to continue to protect and enhance our communities, economy, and environment.

Continual improvement in [comprehensive water management planning](#) by local water agencies in the Sacramento River Basin is our essence and has set our region on a path toward resiliency. To be sure, conservation is a way of life in the Sacramento River Basin and comprehensive efforts continue for sagacious and efficient water management that will serve as a solid foundation for water resources managers to integrate these ideas and the modern priorities described below into local and regional water management efforts. Advancing a water portfolio creates an opportunity to modernize our system by examining our current system and then working hard to evolve this system to reflect California's values now and into the future.

* For purposes of this document, the Sacramento River Basin is the northern part of the Great Central Valley, which includes the watershed that drains into the Sacramento River upstream of the Delta. The terms Sacramento River Basin, Sacramento Valley and Sacramento River Hydrologic Region are all used interchangeably and include the Valley floor, foothills, and headwaters, unless otherwise noted. See the [Water District and Company Map](#).

Sacramento River Hydrologic Region



CA Water Plan Update 2013, Vol. 2, CA Dept. of Water Resources

Policy Priorities: A Roadmap for Climate Resilience and Multi-Benefit Water Management

We offer the following priority areas from our vantage in the Sacramento River Basin. In arriving at these priorities for 2023, we focus on areas that show great promise for California's future and can immediately add value and modernize California's current water system in a manner consistent with NCWA's mission and our shared vision in the region for a vibrant way of life.

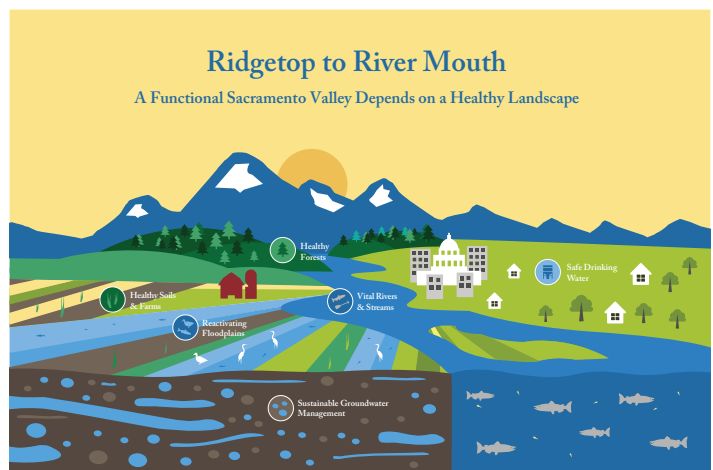
A Modernizing California's Water Management System

In response to unprecedented dry conditions statewide for the past decade, Governor Newsom in August 2022 released California's Water Supply Strategy (Strategy), which calls for the modernization of our water management system, including both 21st century water storage and delivery infrastructure and a water rights system that will support this improved water management as California adapts to our new climate reality and increasing scarcity.

In the Sacramento River Basin, we fully support and will continue to work hard to modernize our water infrastructure and improve the water rights system to support 21st century water management. This ongoing effort will benefit from the expertise of our water resources managers and their consultants, partnering with state and federal agencies and conservation partners, to serve and steward water resources for multiple benefits, including cities and rural communities, farms, fish, wildlife, recreation and hydropower. Working together, we can modernize our water system and improve the administration of the water rights priority system as its legal and operational foundation with improved data, efficiency, and transparency.

Central to modernizing our water management system are the ongoing efforts to create a functional and healthy landscape, which will be our focus in 2023, and is the key to support regional sustainability and our vital rivers. This will be described in more detail in the following section on ridgetop to river mouth water management.

For more detailed ideas, see [Modernizing California's Water Management System](#).



B A Healthy Landscape: Ridgetop to River Mouth Water Management

There are unique opportunities in the Sacramento River Basin to advance ridgetop to river mouth water management, which can best be envisioned by looking holistically at the region and activating the landscape in a concerted way to support our communities, our economy and the environment. Science is increasingly pointing us towards landscape health as the essential ingredient for our vital rivers and streams. As shown above, a healthy landscape includes forests and rangeland, farmland and soils, wildlife refuges and flood bypasses, groundwater aquifers, rivers and streams, and our cities and rural communities. Water resources managers will continue to pursue water management actions that support landowners and focus on 1) salmon recovery, 2) bird and terrestrial recovery programs, 3) floodplain reactivation for public safety and fish and wildlife, 4) sustainable groundwater management, 5) headwaters and forest health, 6) water quality for communities, ecosystems, and all beneficial uses, 7) water transfers, and 8) Sites Reservoir. This holistic approach is described in detail in [Ridgetop to River Mouth](#).

These opportunities all benefit from a ridgetop to river mouth approach and are central to the State's Water Resilience Portfolio, the Water Supply Strategy and embody Governor Newsom's Executive Order for nature-based solutions that "advance multi-benefit, voluntary and cooperative approaches that protect and restore biodiversity while stewarding natural and working lands, building climate resilience, and supporting economic sustainability." The necessary investments are described in more detail in the North State Water Alliance's [How Water Management Investments Improve the Environment in Northern California](#). These opportunities prepare our landscapes for periodic drought and flood cycles, which in turn helps adapt to our climate variability.



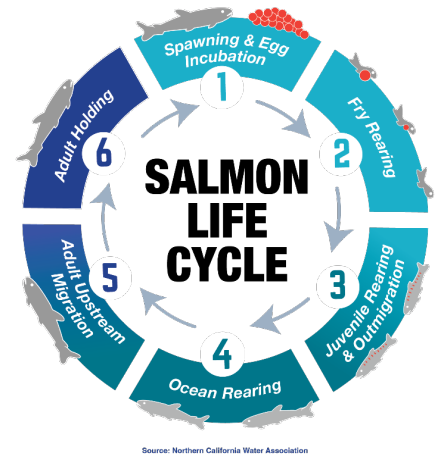
1

Salmon Recovery

Ridgetop to river mouth water management is essential for the recovery of the four runs of salmon in the Sacramento River Basin, as significant efforts are underway to improve conditions for every freshwater life-stage of salmon as they migrate up and down the river systems, and to avoid a weak link in the salmon life-cycle.

The [Sacramento Valley Salmon Recovery Program](#) will benefit all fresh-water life stages of salmon through the implementation of projects in the upper, middle and lower reaches of the regions' rivers and creeks, with a focus on reactivation of the historic floodplain as described below. This includes a concerted effort to improve all freshwater life-stages for salmon: spawning gravel, temperature management for incubation, rearing habitat, migratory corridors, and nourishment, as well as avoiding predation. The Sacramento Valley Salmon Recovery Program will continue to be used to coordinate and prioritize salmon recovery actions with a focus on advancing the [NOAA Fisheries Recovery Plan](#) and the California Natural Resources Agency's [Sacramento Valley Salmon Resiliency Strategy](#). Every water management action from ridgetop to river mouth is necessary to improve salmon conditions.

Our goal the next several years is to broaden the focus on salmon to include all life stages, rather than focus entirely on temperature management issues on the upper Sacramento River. This will focus on working with the agencies to further unconfine the Sacramento River System and activate the landscape as the best solution for fish and wildlife, including floodplain reactivation, Butte Creek, Battle Creek, reintroduction above Shasta, and hatcheries. We will build on the Sacramento Valley Salmon Recovery Program and develop an urgent action plan with NMFS and CDFW to implement these actions, as well as helping better define our objectives for salmon.



2

Bird and Terrestrial Recovery Programs

The Sacramento River Basin has an amazing ecosystem that is closely integrated with farmlands and rural communities. There is a concerted effort to improve and bring this landscape to life as follows:

- We will work with the [Central Valley Joint Venture](#) and our partners to advance its Implementation Plan, which will include efforts to improve water supplies through balanced water management for refuges, ricelands and managed wetlands that provide vital habitat for birds and other terrestrial species. We will also seek to incorporate voluntary conservation programs that would support/encourage the use of nesting cover crops on farm fields that could be idled or fallowed.
- We will also work with federal and state fish and wildlife agencies to help local agencies and landowners improve conditions for the Giant Garter Snake (GGS) by helping implement the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2017 [Recovery Plan for the Giant Garter Snake](#). This will include helping ensure water for “habitat block pairs” as described in the recovery plan.
- We have learned from recent experience that planning in advance to further develop and refine freshwater ecosystem budgets will be essential to serving water for multiple beneficial uses, particularly during drier years. Freshwater ecosystem budgets offer a new approach to integrate environmental water management into our water system to provide specific, targeted benefits rather than the old model of constraining water rights during critical periods with the hope that this action alone will save species. This approach, in turn, will allow us to work collaboratively to evolve from reactive efforts to prevent species decline into a more proactive program to actively promote species recovery in a more comprehensive manner. These opportunities are described in more detail in [Freshwater Ecosystem Budgets in the Sacramento River Basin](#).



3

Reactivating our Floodplains

The Sacramento River Basin is fertile ground for developing a new path to [reactivate our floodplains](#) as a new way forward. We strongly support the [Floodplain Forward Coalition](#) approach to protect public safety and integrate best available science about how river ecosystems function with the practical know-how of farm, flood and wildlife refuge managers. Implementing these dynamic conservation strategies will build resiliency in California's ecosystems and water systems by sustaining the abundant return of migratory birds along the Pacific Flyway, revitalizing river food webs and supporting the recovery of salmon and other fish populations, recharging groundwater aquifers, and improving flood protection in an era of increasing storm severity and climate variability. This approach also supports the objectives contained in the [2022 Central Valley Flood Protection Plan Update](#). To further advance these efforts, we have a working group of diverse partners pursuing efforts to reactivate the floodplain in the Sacramento River Basin on both the [wet and dry sides of the levees](#) with a [Portfolio for Fish and Wildlife](#).



4

Sustainable Groundwater Management

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) provides important opportunities for local agencies to manage water resources in a sustainable manner. The experience in 2014-15 and 2020-22 with dry years and scarcity (lack of surface water supplies) has brought groundwater management into focus, with additional wells, increased water demands, and water quality issues throughout the Valley. Now that local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) submitted Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs), the NCWA Groundwater Management Task Force, in coordination with GSAs and their consultants throughout the region and the Department of Water Resources, have developed a [Pathway for the Future: Sustainable Groundwater Management in the Sacramento Valley](#). The objective is to support GSAs (counties, cities, water agencies and other special districts) and landowners throughout the region to help them create stronger local institutional capacity for GSAs while implementing the foundational GSPs for the Sacramento Valley, including coordinating efforts across the Valley floor, providing education, and fostering mutual respect among agencies. Active management by GSAs through the GSPs across the entire Sacramento Valley floor will be essential for regional sustainability by 2042.

NCWA in the fall of 2021 convened three scenario planning sessions working with state and federal agencies and conservation partners to identify early actions, cooperative approaches, and creative partnerships that can help us protect shared values that will mitigate the economic, social and environmental impacts from another dry year. We continued this in December 2022. As part of this process, we explored opportunities to integrate ridgetop to river mouth actions to provide multiple benefits for our communities, economy and ecosystems for long-term resilience in the face of a changing

climate. These sessions have helped prioritize short-term implementation building upon the newly submitted GSPs. As part of this process, there was a commitment to help strengthen and build the institutional capacity for GSAs, and five regional priorities emerged from the discussion, which will be described below. These sessions renewed our focus on the landscape and natural infrastructure of the Sacramento Valley—including our groundwater aquifer systems—to conjunctively manage our resources and deploy [nature-based solutions](#) to achieve sustainability.

The five priorities for 2023 include: 1) ensure safe drinking water for communities; 2) advance groundwater recharge opportunities; 3) better understand and manage surface water and groundwater interaction (include a coordinated monitoring program for both surface water through the revitalized stream gage network envisioned by SB 19 and groundwater resources); 4) help coordinate effective well permitting programs across the region; and 5) align state and federal priorities with local and regional needs.



5

Headwaters and Forest Health

The forests and meadows of the Sierra Nevada, Coast Range and Cascade Mountains are the source headwaters for the Sacramento River Basin and much of the State of California. A healthy landscape in the headwaters can increase water supply reliability, improve water quality, reduce impacts of catastrophic wildfires, protect our rural communities, increase renewable energy supplies, enhance habitat, and improve resilience to climate variability and extreme weather.

Unfortunately, from 2014 to 2021 California experienced a statewide wildfire emergency of unprecedented scale, with the Sacramento River Basin completely surrounded by fires as shown below. In total, more than 4.3 million acres—over 6,800 square miles covering four percent of the state’s surface area—burned in a single year. Combined with the dramatic impacts and tragic loss of life from recent fires, these events have left Californians with a new awareness of wildfire risks and underscore the need for additional efforts to mitigate and manage the risks of wildfire and protect California’s headwaters. Cannabis production has also created impacts on watershed health that need to be addressed.

Responsible and active forest management is a foundational component of efforts to promote healthy headwaters. As California shifts its focus from immediate emergency response needs to longer-term efforts to enhance and expand the active management our forested headwaters, the actions taken by Sacramento River Basin water managers and their partners provide scalable models for improving the health of our headwaters and reducing wildfire risk. Examples of these management activities include the Placer County Water Agency’s [French Meadows Forest Restoration Program](#) in the American River watershed and the Yuba Water Agency’s pioneering



efforts in forest protection and watershed restoration, including financing these activities through Forest Resilience Bonds. These programs are leading examples of innovative, collaborative, and replicable models for improving forest health that will continue in future years.



6

Protecting and Enhancing Water Quality for Communities, Ecosystems, and All Beneficial Uses

NCWA is committed to a comprehensive set of actions to protect and enhance water quality for the landscape and rivers in the Sacramento River Basin, including work to ensure access to safe drinking water for all communities. These actions include the ongoing implementation of programs to address the full scope of water quality issues in the region, as well as supporting efficient and effective policies to support this work.

Protecting Source Water Quality: The Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition

NCWA will coordinate the Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition (Coalition) and assist its members and subwatershed groups in comprehensive efforts to protect and enhance water quality. The goal is to protect and ensure the availability of high-quality water in the Sacramento River Basin for drinking water, aquatic species and farming, now and into the future. This is described in [Ensuring High Quality Water in the Sacramento River Basin for Communities, Ecosystems and Farms](#) and the related [video](#). This work is focused on continued implementation of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR) for both surface water and groundwater quality and the Basin Plan Amendment for CV-SALTS, as well as groundwater quality issues arising under SGMA.

The Coalition will:

- Continue to utilize the robust set of surface and groundwater quality monitoring and modeling data to ensure a healthy landscape and advance water management priorities across the region, including safe drinking water for all communities and SGMA implementation. In 2022, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board lessened the frequency of surface water quality monitoring, based on fifteen (15) years of sampling, while still ensuring it is sufficient to identify potential surface water quality concerns. Similarly, groundwater quality trending monitoring for nitrate, salinity, boron, magnesium, potassium, sodium and chloride; on-farm drinking water well sampling for nitrates and nitrites; the 2021-22 revision of the Groundwater Quality Assessment Report (GAR); and the development

of Groundwater Quality Protection (GWP) Targets for nitrates based on the Irrigation and Nitrogen Management Plan (INMP) Summary Report information submitted by Coalition Members have identified where the focus needs to be placed on fixing leaching of nitrate to groundwater.

- Continue to coordinate with the California Rice Commission program and will develop and advance partnerships with other commodity groups (e.g., walnuts, almonds, alfalfa), UC Cooperative Extension Crop Advisors, state and local agencies (e.g., CDFA, Agricultural Commissioners, Resource Conservation Districts) and various NGOs to advance the understanding of healthy soils, nitrogen management practices and cover cropping in protecting water quality. These groups will play an important role working with Coalition members in Townships identified as not meeting drinking water to minimize their impacts.
- Initiate stakeholder discussions in the Yolo Basin to provide equitable access to safe drinking water to economically disadvantaged communities and formulate the Early Action Plan and Management Zone Structure for CV-SALTS. In late 2023, the Regional Water Board will issue the Notice to Comply (NTC) for CV-SALTS Nitrate Control Program in Priority 2 Basin, which includes Yolo County. The program is aimed at reducing levels of nitrate in groundwater in the Central Valley over the long term and it helps prioritize, with the initial focus on providing clean drinking water to residents relying on wells where nitrate exceeds the drinking water standard (10 mg/L).
- Advance the understanding of management practices that reduce nitrogen to groundwater basins;
- Identify opportunities to update risk of impairment in groundwater basins through the State Water Board's Domestic Well Needs Assessment and Aquifer Risk Assessment; and
- Pursue state and federal funding (e.g., CVSalts, Environmental Farm Incentives) to contain costs of the Irrigated Lands Program for farmers and ranchers.

Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water: The North State Drinking Water Solutions Network

All Californians have a right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water under the “human right to water” established in state law in 2012. While significant progress has been made toward realizing this right in recent years, there is both an urgent need and an important opportunity to take additional long-term actions to ensure that all communities in the Sacramento River Basin have access to water that meets the health-based standards of the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts.

Sacramento River Basin leaders are committed to advancing a comprehensive approach to expand and ensure access to clean, safe

and affordable drinking water for all communities. This approach is described in detail in [Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water for All California Communities](#). NCWA convenes the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network as a forum to share information and coordinate efforts aimed at ensuring that all communities in the Sacramento River Basin have access to safe drinking water. Successful implementation of sustainable drinking water solutions will require utilization of both the policy tools and [financial resources available to state agencies](#) as well as the knowledge and expertise of local communities and water managers. By emphasizing partnerships with local agencies and administrators, the state will be best positioned to identify and help implement sustainable, locally-appropriate solutions that addresses the various challenges (i.e., technical, managerial and financial issues) that result in a lack of safe and reliable drinking water for communities in the Sacramento Valley and statewide. These efforts to return water systems to compliance through local actions under new and existing state programs will continue with a goal to have no systems out of compliance within the next several years.

7

Facilitate Water Transfers



Water transfers are an important tool that provide California’s water system with water management flexibility and resilience, and can optimize our existing and planned water infrastructure. Water transfers—both intra- and inter-basin—are a basic and yet important element of a water portfolio aimed at meeting the needs of California’s communities, economy, and environment through the 21st century. The transfers allow water resources managers to work collaboratively to address water needs on a regional and/or statewide basis, especially during dry periods.

The State’s Water Resilience Portfolio provides the state will “ease movement of water across the state by simplifying water transfers [and] substantially reducing approval time for transfers while providing protections for the environment and communities.” (§21). We will continue to work with the Department of Water Resources, Bureau of Reclamation, and the State Water Board to expedite their water transfer processes for all these beneficial purposes. We will focus in 2023 on ensuring water for public health and allowing cover crops on lands idled to provide healthy soils and important habitat for birds and other species.

8

Offstream Storage - Sites Reservoir



As Sacramento River Basin water resources managers look to serve multiple benefits in the future, the importance and need for Sites Reservoir becomes clear. Sites Reservoir is an innovative 21st century water project: an off-stream regulating reservoir on the west-side of the Sacramento Valley that can store water for the future by capturing it during high runoff periods, and then releasing it for various beneficial uses at a later time. With its location upstream of the Delta and near the Sacramento River, water in Sites Reservoir would serve multiple benefits in the Sacramento River Basin, as well as the Delta and the rest of the state. Recent dry years have shown the value that these off-stream reservoirs provide California communities and regional water management.

Sites Reservoir would be a dramatic enhancement to California's water system and the first storage project in California with a dedicated supply for the environment. This facility would provide multiple benefits to improve [aquatic habitat conditions](#) and [withstand dry year conditions](#). This reservoir would be operated to accommodate and address the uncertainties created by a changing climate and improve environmental and water supply system resilience. Sites Reservoir can provide a freshwater ecosystem water budget (described above) that would help provide flexibility and make water available during drier years--which would help ensure water availability for the ecosystem. Most importantly, Sites Reservoir would significantly improve the state's water management system in drier periods and restore much needed flexibility and reliability that have been lost in the system.

Recent climate studies have shown that California's winter runoff is likely to remain similar in volume but come in fewer months of the year, concentrating runoff and increasing flood risks. Adapting to this challenge requires infrastructure that can store surplus water when it is available and deploy it for ecosystem and human uses when water is not available. Sites is one of the best opportunities to re-imagine our water system in the 21st century, prepare for future climate variability, and add value to our current water system by providing high-quality water to enhance natural infrastructure, the environment, public safety, the economy, and quality of life for Californians.

9

Delta Conveyance



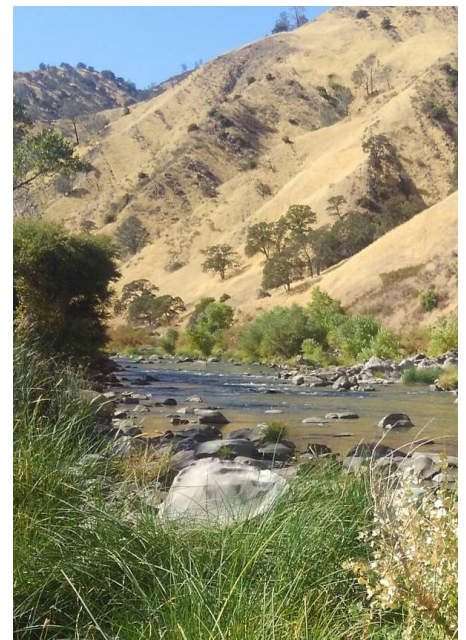
Although improved and modern Delta conveyance is not a priority action for Sacramento River Basin water resources managers, we believe it could be important for California and thus Sacramento River Basin water resources managers welcome the opportunity to work with the state and federal agencies and project proponents on modern Delta conveyance that does not redirect impacts (including water supply, environmental and financial impacts) to the Sacramento River Basin. This work is important to avoid impacts to the region's mosaic of farms, cities and rural communities, fish, birds, and recreation. We believe there are ways the

Central Valley Project and State Water Project can be operated to support modern Delta conveyance, the co-equal goals, and protecting the Delta as a place--while continuing to serve multiple beneficial uses in the Sacramento River Basin and promote regional water sustainability for all of these beneficial purposes. Success in this effort will be a large step forward in a comprehensive water package and to break down the old north versus south binaries.

C Healthy Rivers California – The Voluntary Agreement Process

California water suppliers from throughout the state have worked with state and federal agencies to advance a program for [*Healthy Rivers California: Adapting to our climate reality by strengthening California's landscapes, communities and farms*](#). This robust program is underway to implement projects that integrate flows with the landscape for the benefit of fish, wildlife, farms and cities. The implementation of the Voluntary Agreement Process is central to California's Water Resilience Portfolio and is the cornerstone for local and regional agencies to continue ridgetop to river mouth water investment and management and to resolve conflict by bringing the state and federal agencies together to solve California's water challenges.

- **Ridgetop to River Mouth Water Management.** In the Sacramento River Basin, Healthy Rivers California will enable the various parties to advance ridgetop to river mouth water management, with holistic watershed management for multiple benefits as described above in more detail.
- **Resolution of Litigation and Regulatory Challenges.** There is currently a quagmire of litigation surrounding the Biological Opinions (BiOps), Incidental Take Permit (ITP), and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) proceedings on the Yuba and other rivers that is stifling modern water management throughout California. The Voluntary Agreement process is a new way forward and can serve as a mechanism to help resolve these disputes in a coordinated way that ensures adequate measures for fish and wildlife, while providing the regulatory stability necessary to advance ridgetop to river mouth water management.



Sacramento River Basin leaders are committed to fixing problems rather than fighting over them. In this spirit, we support the Governor's vision to create a collective effort "to cross the finish line on real agreements to save the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta. We must get this done for the resilience of our mighty rivers, for the stability of our agricultural sector, and for the millions and millions of people that depend on this water every day."

D Partnerships and Collaboration

The leaders in the Sacramento River Basin—as part of the “fix it” culture—work with diverse partners in every component of water management and we welcome additional partners who are willing to roll up their sleeves to help advance solutions. Some of the partnerships include:

- Voluntary Agreement Partners.
- Floodplain Forward Coalition.
- Pacific Flyway partnerships, including the California Rice Commission, Ducks Unlimited, California Audubon, California Waterfowl, Nature Conservancy, Point Blue, and refuge managers.
- Salmon partnerships, including American Rivers, California Trout, Ducks Unlimited, EDF, The Nature Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited.
- MOU with CalTrout, Ducks Unlimited and California Rice Commission to promote functioning ecosystems and sustainable water supplies in California’s Sacramento Valley.
- The Regional Water Authority, Mountain Counties Water Association, and the North State Water Alliance, including other water, business and local government partners in Northern California.
- Headwaters and Forest Management Partners.
- Water suppliers, including project exporters (including the State Water Contractors and federal Central Valley Project contractors), the San Joaquin Tributary Association, EBMUD and the North Delta Water Agency.
- The North State Drinking Water Solutions Network.
- Statewide influencers, including the California Water Foundation; Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), and the Water Education Foundation.

The NCWA Board of Directors has both a Conservation and an Agricultural Task Force to help advance these partnerships. We also embrace a new culture of partnerships building on the model for success that has emerged over the past decade, with state and federal agencies encouraging, facilitating and supporting regional and local agencies with the capability, expertise and local knowledge to design and implement the essential elements of a water portfolio. Every policy priority described here would benefit from an approach where state and federal agencies actively support local agencies or joint powers authorities.

E Advance Collaborative Science

A major part of our partnerships in the Sacramento River Basin involves developing collaborative science with agencies and our partners to inform joint learning on species recovery and water management. This includes the following programs:

- Our [MOU](#) with CalTrout, Ducks Unlimited, and the California Rice Commission around promoting functioning ecosystems and sustainable water supplies
- [Sacramento Water Forum](#)
- [Sacramento River Science Program](#)
- [Yuba River Science](#)
- [The Delta Science Program](#)

F Funding to Pursue the Portfolio

We believe the water portfolio approach provides a solid foundation for the state and federal agencies to support these priorities, including funding through general fund opportunities, federal appropriations, and the next generation of state general obligation climate/water bond that will unify parties and provide a catalyst for local, regional and state agencies to implement the actions necessary to support the portfolio approach. We particularly support state and federal funding and investment in landscape-scale initiatives, such as expanding the use of natural infrastructure through reactivated floodplains, forest health initiatives, and groundwater recharge. Helping local agencies navigate and secure funding under Propositions 218 and 26 to advance these measures would also be helpful.

G Congress, California Legislature

We look forward to working with Congress and the California Legislature to help implement, support and fund the policy priorities for the Sacramento River Basin.



The Pillars for Sustainable Water Management in the Sacramento River Basin

The following pillars embrace our culture and ethos in the Sacramento River Basin and they work with the strong foundation in the region to support our priorities and actions:

- Foster a **regional approach** among the water suppliers and local governments in the region. The NCWA leadership will work with water suppliers, local governments, landowners and conservationists to aggressively and strategically implement these priorities and the NCWA vision to advance the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the Sacramento River Basin by safeguarding its high quality water supplies for the rich mosaic of farmlands, cities and rural communities, refuges and managed wetlands, and meandering rivers that support fisheries, wildlife, and recreation. This regional approach helps advance sustainable water management for all beneficial uses and users of water in the Sacramento River Basin for today and future generations.
- Focus on **population health and wellness** and the importance of enhancing our world so people can live healthier and more fulfilling lives. This moment in time provides an opportunity for introspection, a time to think about our families and friends, what is essential in our lives, and how we can contribute to population health and wellness. In the Sacramento River Basin, our team is working hard to envision the role that water suppliers and local governments can serve to help people live healthier and more fulfilling lives. We have learned and increasingly believe that population health is inextricably tied to climate resiliency and ecological health: our rivers, soils, air, trees, watersheds and floodplains—and the way they function together.
- Sacramento River Basin leaders are committed to **fixing problems rather than fighting** over them. In this spirit, we believe a collaborative approach is central to water resources management in the region and is highly preferred to acrimony and litigation. As an example, an adversarial, regulatory approach to updating the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan will only delay and misdirect valuable resources away from the collaborative and innovative water management described in this roadmap. Instead, we are advancing the [Voluntary Agreement Process for Healthy Rivers](#) as a catalyst for all the creative and innovative actions described in this document, including priority habitat and flow actions that will advance species recovery and continue the momentum and collaboration necessary to successfully implement a resilience portfolio.
- Advance **multi-benefit water management** approaches that meet multiple needs at once, which include cities, farms, fish, birds, other wildlife, recreation, and hydropower. Multi-benefit water management is the hallmark of the Sacramento River Basin. See [Managing Water in the Sacramento Valley for Multiple Benefits](#) and the related [video](#).
- Support **nature-based solutions** that use our natural and working lands to sustain our economy, support our unique biodiversity and contribute to the global food supply. These working landscapes, which provide essential benefits for our economy, health and quality of life—including clean water,

nutritious food, outdoor recreation—and contribute to the state’s climate goals and protecting our communities from wildfire, floods, droughts and extreme heat. These programs will “advance multi-benefit, voluntary and cooperative approaches that protect and restore biodiversity while stewarding natural and working lands, building climate resilience, and supporting economic sustainability” as called for by the Governor.

- Prepare for **dry years**. Every element of this portfolio is designed to provide improved resilience during dry years. NCWA has convened a Dry Year Task Force to improve communication, help implement the water rights priority system and ensure water for all beneficial uses. The Task Force works with state and federal agencies and conservation partners to work together and better prepare for these drier years.
- Prepare for a **changing climate**. Recent studies have shown that California’s winters are likely to be warmer and the hydrology is likely to be more concentrated in fewer months of runoff. Slowing water down as it moves through the Sacramento River Basin, more effectively utilizing floodplains, groundwater and surface storage reservoirs will help adapt working landscapes and ecosystems to climate variability.
- A **new culture of partnerships** building on the model for success that has emerged over the past decade, with state and federal agencies encouraging, facilitating and supporting regional and local agencies with the capability, expertise and local knowledge to design and implement the essential elements of a water portfolio. Every policy priority described here would benefit from an approach where state and federal agencies support local agencies or joint powers authorities.
- Build **trust and credibility** across the different communities engaged in water through honest discourse and mutual respect, while working with various technical experts to develop and make decisions based on credible information and data.
- We are an **inclusive organization** that values the perspectives, contributions, and experiences of all Californians. These values are reflected in our work. We have an active water leaders’ program where we seek diverse participation from leaders with a both a passion and interest in Northern California water issues and making the Sacramento River Basin a better place. We will continue to find solutions to ensure safe, reliable and affordable water for all communities through our Drinking Water Solutions Network. As we move forward, we will continue to listen to, engage with, and learn from our fellow Californians.
- Our strategic goal is to inspire **thoughtful public discourse and collaboration** that points positive and brings people together—working towards a re-imagined water system that will assure reliable, affordable and high-quality water supplies will be available to serve multiple benefits in the Sacramento River Basin now and for future generations.
- Although our priorities are set in the Sacramento River Basin where we devote our time and energy, these ideas hold promise to help address **statewide needs** and we will integrate our priorities with other regions as part of statewide solutions for one California.



We appreciate the efforts of both the state and federal governments to advance water management approaches that create resilience and will help us meet the needs of California's communities, economy, and environment through the 21st century. We look forward to working with the Administrations, the Legislature and Congress, and our various partners to advance these efforts.

Copies of this plan are available at www.norcalwater.org. We would welcome any additional ideas or thoughts by email at info@norcalwater.org.



NCWA
Northern California Water Association

455 Capitol Mall # 703 ● Sacramento, CA 95814
p: (916) 442-8333 ● www.norcalwater.org